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ABSTRACT

The teaching and self-study materials of the Phonological Transcription Accompanied Text (PTAT) method takes into account both sides of the debate over reading instruction in which the skills-emphasis partisans and the meaning-emphasis partisans are engaged. PTAT materials attempt to make the best use of children's oral language and rich repertoire of sight words to develop an automatic, unconscious decoding skill. PTAT materials include the following features as visual clues to help pupils read independently: (1) a simple set of phonemes; (2) authentic reading materials; and (3) the pronunciation of each word transcribed directly underneath each individual word using the appropriate set of phonemes. The first prerequisite of using PTAT materials is to be able to recognize and blend the sound symbols. Once pupils are able to recognize and blend the phonemes to a certain degree, the PTAT materials can be phased in. Using the materials will improve the child's ability to recognize and blend the sounds. For the PTAT materials to work efficiently, several things need to be considered: publishers need to publish children's magazines, textbooks, and stories that include the three features of PTAT materials; texts of other courses (science, social studies, and mathematics) should also incorporate PTAT features; teachers for the early grades should be able to transcribe the sound of each word instantly when they hear the pupils say a word; and there is a need for research to identify the right time to totally phase out the PTAT materials. (Contains 21 references.) (RS)

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PTAT: Learning to Read Materials that Bridge
the Gap Between Skills-Emphasis and
Meaning-Emphasis Approaches

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PTAT: Learning to Read Materials that Bridge the Gap Between
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Adams (1990) described that due to the nature of the English writing system, the partisanships (the skills-emphasis partisan vs. the meaning-emphasis partisan) surrounding reading instruction are fierce. The skills-emphasis partisan proclaims that early systematic instruction in phonics provides the child with the skills necessary to become an independent reader at an earlier age (Adams, 1990; Anderson et al., 1985; Juel & Roper/Schneider, 1981). Early decoding leads to wide reading. "Wide reading provides opportunities to grow in vocabulary, concepts, and knowledge of how text is written. Children who do not learn to decode do not have this avenue for growth" (Beck & Juel, 1992, p. 105).

The meaning-emphasis partisan builds on Dewey's learning-by-doing views and expands on the psychological research and theories of Piaget and Vygotsky (Goodman, 1992). They have emphasized that children, who are instructed using the meaning-emphasis approach, are more critical in reading and strive continuously for content (Avery, 1985). The children's development of basic vocabulary and phonics skills does not suffer from the emphasis on authentic reading and writing (Freppon, 1988). The children can develop an interest in reading and writing and an ability to take responsibility for their own learning (Pierce, 1984), are more strategic in reading, feel

better about themselves as readers and writers, and focus more on meaning and the communicative nature of language (Stice & Bertrand, 1989).

This debate about the best way to introduce children to learn to read has been going on for decades (Samuels, Schermer & Reinkin, 1992; Turner, 1989); therefore, Turner (1989, p. 283) suggests:

It is time for reading experts to turn away from the debate over systematic phonics in search of more powerful instructional treatments for beginning reading that will influence the development of literacy in the middle grades and beyond.

Therefore, the purpose of the paper is to present a type of teaching and self-study materials, Phonological Transcription Accompanied Text (PTAT), which includes the text features used in Taiwan since 1949 in teaching children to read the logographic or ideographic Mandarin Chinese. It also takes into account both the partisanship by providing the beginning readers a meaningful context in which they may form the phonic skills without being purposefully taught or being deprived of the opportunities to develop the abilities to become a flexible, strategic, self-confident, and independent life-long reader and writer.

What Provides the Theoretical and Research Bases for the Use of PTAT Materials?

These PTAT materials attempt to make the best use of children's oral language and rich repertoire of sight words to develop an automatic, unconscious decoding skill, and to provide "an ideal reading situation in which the demands of decoding and comprehension require less attention than the reader has available" (Samuels, Schermer & Reinkin, 1992, p. 130). Evidence has shown that first graders have well-developed language subsystems. They have a semantic or word meaning system that contains about 5,000 words (Ruddell & Haggard, 1985). Sight word learning takes place before most children enter kindergarten or first grade; children learn to identify countless labels of important things in their environment (Guszek, 1985). Singer and Donlan (1989, p. 73) also pointed out that "Readers develop a repertoire of sight words as a result of repetition, most frequently by perceiving the same words repeatedly in a variety of printed materials". Brown (1980) also stated that there is a universal cognitive tendency for children to over-generalize. He pointed out (pp. 22-23):

. . . the child's language at any stage is systematic. The child is constantly forming hypotheses on the basis of input he receives and then testing those hypotheses in his own speech. As the child's language develops, those hypotheses get continuously re-

vised, reshaped, or sometimes abandoned.

Watson (1988) found that young children's spelling errors are not haphazard but systematic and follow a developmental sequence as the children master the consistent use of correct spelling. Therefore, the PTAT materials include the following features as visual clues to help pupils read independently:

1. A simplest set of phonemes. According to Ladefoged (1975), the types of sound symbols used by linguists and phoneticians are not consistent. Therefore, the set of consonant and vowel phonemes chosen for the PTAT materials is as follows: consonants - /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /h/, /č/, /ǰ/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /l/, /r/, /y/, and /w/; vowel sounds - /i/, /ɪ/, /e/, /ɛ/, /æ/, /u/, /ʊ/, /o/, /ɔ/, /a/, /ʌ/, /ə/, and /ɐ/ (Stageberg, 1981) and one diacritical marker " ' " to indicate the syllable that receives the accent.

2. Authentic reading materials. Pattern books are often criticized as uninteresting. Using word count and readability in basal readers also makes the stories sound less authentic (Anderson et al., 1985). Therefore, the most common children's literature or trade books familiar to kindergartners and first and second graders are used.

3. The pronunciation of each word is transcribed directly underneath each individual word, using the phonemes and the accent marker chosen in Feature One. However, this step also includes the following features:

a. Underlining is used to break syllables. In each book, the sounds

will be directly transcribed underneath each word. Underlining is used to break the syllables of the words with two or more syllables. The underlining is also used to break the phonological transcriptions with two or more syllables. Therefore, "another person" would become "another person" and /ə'nʌðə 'pɜːsn / become /ənʌðə /pɜːsn/. This underlining is provided for building children's ability in breaking syllables automatically and provided as an aid for seeing the contrast between the spelling of each syllable and its corresponding sound transcription.

b. Selective phase-out process is used to check automaticity. The selective phase-out process means that if a word appears very often in the first few pages of a story book, the underlining and phonological transcription of the word will be deleted in the rest of the story. This step will focus students' attention on the regular English words and provide as a check for the students to see whether they have recognized the words that appear often in the previous pages.

Prerequisite to the Use of the PTAT Materials

In order to use the PTAT materials, the first prerequisite is to be able to recognize and blend the sound symbols. Children should be instructed to build the ability to blend sounds at sight in meaningful situations. Research evidence has indicated that preschool children can be trained to manipulate

the phonological elements in words (Lundberg, Frost & Peterson, 1988) and segment phonemes (Ball & Blachman, 1991). Singer & Donlan (1989, p. 62) also pointed out, "Some children acquire phonemic awareness on their own prior to first grade, probably by abstracting sounds from words." Back and Juel (1992, p. 108) also described, "Although it is not clear how children gain phonemic awareness, certain activities do appear to foster it. Home factors such as time spent on word play, nursery or Dr. Seuss rhymes, and general exposure to storybooks appear to contribute to phonemic awareness." Sheer exposure to lots of words also allows children to induce letter-sound correspondence knowledge (Juel & Roper/Schneider, 1981).

Materials for teaching the pupils how to blend the consonant and vowel sounds may vary from teacher to teacher. However, they can be taken directly by asking students to orally name some familiar objects during class. The words are then transcribed phonologically on the board, followed by the sentences taken from students' oral language and transcribed phonologically on the board during class. For later training in recognizing and blending sounds, some pupils can volunteer to tell a story to the class; the teacher, then, takes dictation of the story and transcribes phonologically. This can provide homework for students to read the transcription and write down the story in regular or approximate spelling.

Eight weeks can be provided for training to use phoneme recognition

and blending ability in the beginning of the first grade. Because evidence from Chinese kindergartens indicates that preschoolers can be taught the thirty-seven very artificial Chinese phonemes (ㄅ, ㄆ, ㄇ, ㄌ, . . . , which do not resemble the Chinese logographs or ideographs) by singing the phoneme sounds as most American Children do in singing the alphabet song. Furthermore, in the first grade classrooms, eight weeks are provided for the pupils to learn how to recognize and blend the thirty-seven artificial phonemes and how to use the five tones. All children from different family backgrounds are able to recognize, blend, and write these sounds successfully within these eight weeks. Some children are able to write short paragraphs using the phonemes¹. We believe that it would be rather easy for the American pupils to recognize and blend the sounds due to the high correspondence between letters and sound transcriptions in configuration.

Steps in Using the PTAT Materials

Once the pupils are able to recognize and blend the phonemes to a certain degree, the PTAT materials can be phased in. Using the materials will also improve the ability to recognize and blend the sounds. Therefore, the responsibility of the teacher can be shifted from teaching the pupils how to blend the phonemes to focusing on motivating the pupils to read, developing

¹ This information was offered by Huang Gin-to, principal of Bo Ai Elementary school, and Ms. Shieh Chung-mei, Ms. Lin Chi-fe, and Ms. Li Bi-ye, teachers at Bei Wen Elementary school, Chia-yii City, Taiwan, R. O. C. (December, 1991)

their interest in books, and teaching the pupils how to read for meaning.

The teacher may occasionally monitor the pupils by asking them to retell stories, or read the beginning of stories to the pupils and ask them to continue the rest of the stories. When children attempt to blend sounds in order to figure out a word, it is not necessary for them to produce a perfect pronunciation; instead, they just need to come up with approximate sounds (Anderson et al. 1985). The teacher has to assign the PTAT materials as homework and ask the pupils to retell the stories when they come to class the next day.

Some Considerations

Based on research evidence, children are rich in the repertoire of sight words or words in their oral language. This can be used as a reader's resource, along with the aid of the phonological transcription, to develop phonics awareness and read more independently and widely. It is believed that if children are provided with a set of cues in a meaningful context as a constant visual input, they would be able to form unconscious rules, following the set of cues. Therefore, it is also believed that children will be able to form automaticity in word decoding skills if they are provided with phonological transcription in predictable and interesting stories, with the help of cues that signal sounds and syllables. However, for the PTAT materials to be

able to work efficiently, there are some other things to be considered:

1. There is a need for the publishers to offer help in publishing children's magazines, textbooks, and stories in which the three features of the PTAT materials: sound-transcription, underlining, and selective phase-out process, are included. Without the cooperation from the publishers, the PTAT materials may be limited in number and students may not have enough immersion.

2. The texts of other courses such as science, social studies, and mathematics, should also incorporate with the use of the three PTAT features to provide the pupils a more extensive immersion, as do the Chinese textbooks across all different curricula at the early elementary grades.

3. Incorporating the sounds transcription into the regular texts may, for some people, destroy the beauty of the text. Some may question whether the young pupils will look at the sound transcription as what they have to read. However, we believe that by using the selective phase-out process, children's attention will be diverted to the regular English words. The use of PTAT texts will decrease and phase out when the grade levels increase.

4. Under this approach, teachers for the early grades should be able to transcribe the sound of each word instantly when they hear the pupils say a word.

5. There is a need for research to find out when is the time to totally

phase out the PTAT materials and when and how much the pupil can derive phonic rules and achieve automaticity in recognizing words from using the PTAT approach.

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